

# ***A Single Voice Above The Noise***

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## A Single Voice Above The Noise by Ness09

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**Summary:**

Stan doesn't have a soulmate. That is fine. He doesn't need one. Or so he thought until he suddenly hears a different voice in his head.

Meanwhile Richie and Eddie can't wait to meet each other and just have to make do with what they've got.

## A Single Voice Above The Noise

Some people heard voices in their head and Stan had a hard time understanding how these people were not on medication or in therapy. No... hearing voices was considered a good thing, desirable. Well, voices, plural, might not be. But hearing your soulmate talking to you was normal. At least that's what people said, Stan had never experience it and he was honestly pretty glad about that. Sometimes he wondered if he should try it, but the day he gave in and tried to communicate telepathically with someone who probably wasn't even real, he'd lose all self-respect. It's not that Stan didn't believe in soulmates, and he somehow also believed in the voices thing, because his friend Eddie heard a voice, and he didn't think Eddie was crazy. But Stan didn't believe that hearing a voice would be good for him and he didn't believe there was a soulmate for him. That's normal too, not everyone had one.

He was in his mid-twenties, if he had a soulmate, he'd have heard him by now, right? Eddie said, he's heard the voice for years now. Stan didn't know how he dealt with it, because there's no rules to the voices and everything needed to have rules, everything needed to follow a certain path. So no, Stan was not envious of the people hearing voices. He was quite happy that he didn't, but if everyone could stop pitying him every time he said so, that would be great.

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*Sweetcheeks!*

**I've told you not to call me that.**

*You never like any of my names for you.*

**Because they're awful!**

*If I knew your name, I could personalize them for you.*

Richie immediately regretted saying that, he knew what was going to happen next and sure...

**My name is...** And then silence.

Richie groaned. He had wanted to tell him about band practice, but now his soulmate was gone. This always happened when either of them tried to be a bit more specific. At first, he had thought his soulmate was a fucking tease, always shutting up when they tried to arrange a meeting or whatever.

He passed the time by playing his guitar. There was this new song they've been working on and Richie still wasn't completely happy with the chords, but every time he mentioned it, Bev and Bill shut him down. They were sick of his perfectionism. Richie snorted loudly at that thought, who would've guessed anyone would ever call him a perfectionist, but maybe it was true. When it came to his music he never settled for anything less.

**Fuck! Fate is such a bitch!**

*You're back! Can't believe you still fall for that.*

**Maybe you shouldn't fucking bait me like that.**

*Didn't know you were so eager to get another nickname, babe.*

Richie could've sworn he heard his soulmate groan, although he knew that wasn't possible. Words only. When he had heard him for the first time, he had been ecstatic, but by now the telepathy thing had gotten so restrictive. If fate was going to be so extra about them finally meeting in person, it could hurry up a bit. Every time they

tried to communicate any information that could lead to them finding the other, the connection – or whatever one wanted to call it – would cut off. It was becoming a pain in the ass.

**I don't even know how you come up with them. It's been 10 years and you still come up with new ones.**

*What can I say, I'm dedicated to show you my love.*

**Fuck off!**

Sometimes Richie wasn't sure what would happen if he were to meet his soulmate. He loved the banter, but a small part of him worried too. What if he didn't like him? What if all this time his soulmate had been serious and Richie had mistaken it for a playful, sarcastic thing?

**If you'd put the same dedication into guessing my name, you'd probably gotten it by now.**

*Right back at you, Chad.*

**That's definitely not it.**

*Harry?*

**No.**

*Hank?*

**Try again.**

*Hulk?*

**Are you even trying?**

*Harriet?*

**That's a girl's name! Do I sound like a girl? Shit, do I?**

Richie laughed. He could hear the suppressed panic in the voice and in his imagination his soulmate was blushing. He was probably cute when he blushed. The whole name-guessing thing was a game they played. Even if he did guess right, Richie doubted fate would let him know, so neither of them had been taking it very seriously. His soulmate had actually called him Nelson for a week and Richie was still going to get him back for that some day.

*I know you're not a girl, idiot! Have you forgotten our dick measuring contest?*

**That did not happen!**

*Did so. You were at that party right when you started college and so drunk. It was hilarious.*

**Stop making shit up!**

He was, but he still remembered that night fondly. Richie had listened to his soulmate babble on drunkenly about how much he'd hoped to run into him at college, how tired of waiting he was and it had been so sweet that Richie had completely forgotten to make fun of him for being so drunk. Too bad his soulmate couldn't remember

any of that, but at least it had opened up millions of opportunities for Richie to mess with him.

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“Hey Stan.” He looked up from the book he was reading to see Eddie had emerged from his room. “Do you remember that party we went to when we first started college?”

Stan sighed. “You mean the one, where you got so drunk you couldn’t walk straight and managed to get lost? How could I forget when you bring it up every other week? That must have been one hell of a party for you.”

Eddie’s cheeks turned slightly pink as he made his way over to his favourite arm chair. “Did I...” He stopped himself, burying his face in his hands for a moment.

“Did you what?”, Stan asked, quirking an eyebrow at his friend’s behaviour.

“Never mind.”

Stan shrugged and went back to his book. He figured it was a soulmate thing, because Eddie always asked about that party after having had one of his weird head conversations. At least he had them in his room now, because it had gotten on Stan’s nerves to have to see Eddie laugh, groan or roll his eyes at some invisible person. He wasn’t jealous. Why would he be? Eddie hadn’t even met that mystery guy and it didn’t look like he had gotten any closer to finding out his identity over the past 10 years.

The following silence was broken by Mike entering their apartment. After college, it had only made sense for all three of them to keep living together. At least until something major happened that

demanded relocation. Stan knew they'd both be gone once they finally met their soulmates and he thought he'd be okay with it when that day would come, but he had been thinking about that for almost four years now and he still wasn't sure what would become of him then.

"You guys don't have any plans for Halloween, right?", Mike said, tossing his bag and into his room before coming over. Unwillingly Stan pulled his feet to his chest, making room for Mike on the couch. "I've got us into a party."

"Do we have to?", Eddie asked.

Stan simply said. "No."

"And costumes are required", Mike said, ignoring their protests. "I already said you were coming."

"Who even plans a Halloween party this early? It's barely even September." Stan didn't know what he hated more: having to go to a party or that someone was rushing the normal order of things. Summer had just ended, now it was time for fall not Halloween.

"Beverly Marsh. Or maybe it's her roommate. She's this girl, who used to work in the college library with me. I ran into her at work today."

Stan vaguely remembered hearing that name before, but couldn't put a face to it. It didn't matter, he was still not going. Parties were messy and loud and whenever his friends had dragged him to one, something had gone horribly wrong. It was probably one of nature's laws. It would be best for everyone if he just stayed home.



“I don’t want to go.”

Mike rolled his eyes, grabbed the book from Stan’s hands and put it on the coffee table. Without marking the page. Stan glared at him, clasp his hands to stop himself from fixing that mistake.

“I can’t believe I’m the coolest person in our friend group”, Mike said. “I’m a librarian for fucks sake.”

“That’s discriminating against librarians everywhere”, Stan said, still eyeing the book on the table. His fingers twitched with the need to find his spot and bookmarking it.

“And there’s so much sexy librarian porn out there, I highly doubt that being a librarian makes you uncool”, Eddie added.

Mike grinned at him. “Is that what you’re into? Want me to introduce you to Tom? He’d probably do the sexy librarian thing for you.”

Eddie spluttered and turned a bright red, but quickly shook his head. Stan seized the moment to finally grab his books, flick through the pages, place his bookmark and put it back on the table. Now he could relax and actually focus on what Eddie had said. Did he really want to know what kind of porn Eddie was watching? No, no, he definitely didn’t need to know that. Didn’t need to know about any sexual preferences either. It was bad enough he walked in on him masturbating that one time, when they still shared a dorm room. Would he ever be able to scrub that image from his mind?

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Stan was on his way back home after spending his Sunday birdwatching in the nearest forest. He rarely had the time to get out of the city these days, especially since he started the new job. Boring ass job, was what Mike called it, which was ridiculous because it was

Mike's job to babysit a hall of books. That didn't scream excitement either.

Anyway, birdwatching in the city was fun too, but once in a while Stan liked to get away from everything and just wander through nature. After a whole day of that he was eager to get back and take a shower though. He had just gotten out of his car and was crossing the parking lot, when he heard the voice for the first time.

**He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.**

Stan stopped immediately. Where had that come from? He looked around, but he was alone. The people on the other side of the parking lot would've had to shout at him and the voice had been soft and calm. For a moment he thought, he had made it up, but then it came again: **He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.**

What did it mean? He had never heard that phrase before, meaning it was definitely not coming from his own brain.

**He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.**

I'm not going to speak to this voice. I'm not. It's not real. He'd always been clear on his position regarding this whole soulmate business and what kind of person was his soulmate anyway, if he was chanting that weird phrase? Why would he want Stan to hear that? Was it a hidden message? Or maybe it wasn't a soulmate thing at all and he was losing his mind. What if his mind was playing tricks on him.

**He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.**

“Shut up”, he muttered and continued his way to his apartment. He could already feel the headache coming on. “Shit!”

At least the chanting stopped. Stan took a deep breath as he entered the elevator and smiled at his reflection. Silence. Good. He was not going crazy after all.

### **Can you hear me?**

Stan closed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose and counted to ten. This was not happening. He would just ignore the voice and it would go away and that would be the end of it.

### **Years of silence and the first thing you say to me is ‘Shut up’? Wow.**

And he was about to do it again, but then Stan stopped himself. No. Besides, he hadn’t been talking to the chanting voice at all; he’d told his brain to shut up, that was different. Although his brain did not have such a soft, velvety voice and he kind of wanted to listen to it more. He could apologize for being rude... What was he thinking? You did not need to apologize to a voice in your head that was intruding with weird chanting. Absolutely not.

Stan only noticed that his hands were shaking, when he had trouble getting the key into the lock. Fuck this! But at least the voice had stopped. When he finally got the door open, he was greeted by an empty apartment, which was just as well. This way he didn’t have to lie to Eddie or Mike, who would probably have sensed something was wrong. He’d take his shower and compose himself and then everything could go back to normal.

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“What d-d-do you do wh-wh-when y-your soulmate is an ass-h-hole?”

Richie, Ben and Bev looked up, when Bill burst into the garage they had rented for band practice. Not only was he late, but he looked mad. Richie’s interest was immediately piqued. He’d known Bill since they were kids and they’d just assumed Bill didn’t have a soulmate since he’d never heard them. Had he just never told him? No, that couldn’t be it. Bill wouldn’t do that to him.

“What?”, Ben asked.

“He’s igno-no-no-noring me. T-t-t-tells me to sh-sh-shut up and then he ign-n-n-n-...” Bill’s face was red, but Richie was not sure how much that had to do with his anger or with the words stuck in his throat.

“What did you say to him?”, Bev asked. She stepped forward, put an arm around his shoulder and let him to the ratty old couch that was only here for the rare guest, who wanted to hear them play.

“N-n-n-nothing. I was ordering a c-c-c-coffee bef-f-fore coming here a-a-and the bar-ri-ri-rista was g-g-g-getting f-f-f-fed up with m-m-m-my st-stutter”, Bill explained. That explained why his stutter was so bad today. Some days he barely stuttered anymore, but being put on the spot like that and his soulmate being an asshole would probably do the trick. “A-a-and I was p-p-p-practis-s-s-sing the phrase.”

“He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts”, Richie said and Bill nodded.

“I wasn’t e-e-e-even t-t-talking to him, b-but he must’ve heard.”

“Yeah, that happens sometimes. Swish has a habit of doing that.” Swish or SVIH(Sexy Voice In (my) Head) was how Richie referred to his soulmate. This whole no-names-thing was a pain in the ass and he had to talk about him somehow. Sure, his friends hated it, but probably not as much as his soulmate would if he knew about it.

“Does he know he does that?”, Beverly asked, but Richie just grinned at her, giving her all the answer she needed. Of course, he wouldn’t tell him, because then he’d be more careful about their bond and Richie loved those random thoughts that popped into his head. And he could listen to that voice all day.

Beverly rolled her eyes at him then turned her attention back to Bill, gently stroking his back. “You probably just caught him off guard. Maybe he was doing something important.” “On a Sunday evening?”, Richie asked and immediately earned a glare from Ben and Bev.

“Maybe it’s not Sunday evening where he is”, Ben said helpfully. Maybe he just didn’t want to be the only one who was doomed to never find his soulmate. Well, okay, maybe not never... Richie still thought Ben was a hopeless romantic. Not only had he learned another language to communicate with his soulmate, but it was Japanese – and Richie had heard that was a particularly hard one to learn – and Ben was flying there at least once a year on the off-chance of meeting his soulmate. Sometimes Richie wondered if he would’ve done the same for his Swish and he honestly wasn’t sure. He was just grateful he didn’t have to.

Richie sat down on the other side of Bill and clapped him on the shoulder. “At least we now know you have a soulmate”, he said.

“Who hates m-m-me.”

Richie cupped Bill’s face in his hands and squeezed until his lips

formed a pout. “Nah. Who could hate this cutie? Everyone loves you, Big Bill.”

“For once, Richie is right”, Bev said. Of course he was. Richie had not met a single person who disliked Bill, that was just his charm. Sure, lots of people got annoyed because of Bill’s stutter, but those were assholes. Nobody who took their time to get to know Bill – and you had to know a person to hate them – had ever disliked him.

“You should try again later. Maybe he’s more open to talk to you then”, Ben suggested, then he chuckled and shook his head. “It’s a guy, huh? I can’t believe I’m the only straight person in this band.”

“Does that really surprise you, Haystack? Bill’s been caught making out with guys multiple times”, Richie said.

“Only because y-y-y-you think it’s f-funny to barge into p-p-eople’s rooms w-w-w-with a cam-m-era. Thank Fuck I d-d-don’t l-live with you anym-m-more.” Bill’s face had returned to a more natural colour, but the tips of his ears were still slightly pink, his telltale sign for embarrassment. It pleased Richie. He lived to embarrass his friends that’s how every normal person showed affection.

“He doesn’t do that anymore”, Bev said, giving Richie the stinkeye. Pff, he would still do that, because all his followers on snapchat loved to see his friends getting some, but Bev was scary when she was angry and Richie had never seen her angrier than when he had tried to do the same to her. “You just have to train him right.”

“Anyway”, Richie said. He did not like it when Bev talked about him like he was a dog and she did that a lot. If he didn’t love her so much, she would be his nemesis. “Haystack, you’re the token hetero and you’ve always been. Guess you’ve been too fucking busy talking to your anime lady to pay attention to Bill fucking everything with legs. He’s not particular about his taste.”

“First of all, she is not an anime lady!”, Ben barked. He was always so protective of her, it was kind of sweet, when it didn’t mean he was punching Richie to defend her honour. “And second of all, that sounds more like you than Bill.”

“Thanks B-b-ben.”

Richie wiggled his eyebrows. “Don’t let his sweet exterior fool you. Big Bill is a slut and I have proof.”

He did not, but a bottle of tequila could bring the slut out. It had been a while since he had gotten Bill drunk and maybe they should remedy that.

*Remind me to put tequila on the shopping list for my Halloween party.*

**Can you stop abusing me as your secretary and just write shit down for a change?**

*I don’t own a pen.*

**Not a single one?**

*No, I usually just forget stuff like a cool person. But the tequila is important.*

**It’s not just an excuse to talk to me?**

*Babe, I don’t need an excuse to talk to you. If you feel neglected I’ll talk to you all night.*

**I'll pass. I have work tomorrow.**

He was snapped out of the conversation by Ben waving his drumsticks in front of his nose. Bill and Bev had already taken their spots by their instruments. Bev grinned at him, knowingly. She always knew when he was talking to the Swish, but Richie didn't care if he looked like an idiot when he did. They talked every day, but they often didn't have time to speak for very long and Richie just wanted to spend more time with him and finally meet him. Fate really needed to hurry the fuck up.

**That's really sweet though. Rain check?**

*Of course, Baby Cakes.*

He didn't answer, but Richie just knew he was annoyed, maybe he was rolling his eyes or groaning or even cursing him. Richie would give his right arm to see that.

"Are we practicing or what, Romeo?", Bev shouted and Richie finally grabbed his guitar and took his place at the microphone.

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Although he had managed to calm down enough, Stan couldn't forget about the stupid voice and its mantra. He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts... What did that mean?

The words repeated in his head all night until he finally fell into a restless sleep, but in the morning they were still there. Was it really just the words or was it the voice? He had convinced himself there was no soulmate for him, he was okay with that, but now... That was not how his life was supposed to go. He hated it when plans changed. How was this soulmate going to fit into everything he had planned



out? He was going to work in accounting for another couple of years, working his way up and then they would either make him partner or he would start up his own business. It wasn't his dream, but it was his plan. It was what he was supposed to do, what his parents wanted and Stan wanted to please them. Sometime in the next couple of years he would find a nice, Jewish girl and get married and give them grandkids. Also not his dream, but he kind of liked that. He knew his friends would eventually move away and he didn't want to be alone. What would his parents say if he told them, he had a soulmate and that his soulmate was a man?

When he got home from work that day, he was still repeating the phrase over and over again, convinced there was some kind of hidden meaning that he just couldn't figure out. His head was pounding and he had already taken four aspirin. Although he knew he shouldn't take too many – Eddie had held several speeches about how bad it was for your liver to take too many painkillers, not to mention if he needed emergency surgery and his blood was thin like water – but Stan didn't think he would be having surgery any time soon, so he took another one.

In the end, he gave in.

*He thrusts his fists against the posts and still insists he sees the ghosts.  
What does that mean?*

Now he was just like everyone else, talking to a voice in his head. Maybe he really didn't have a soulmate and he was crazy. Maybe he had a brain tumour or hallucinations? That would make much more sense than having his soulmate give him riddles. Fuck. He should make an appointment with his doctor.

**It doesn't mean anything.** He wasn't sure if that was the voice or his own mind spiralling further into insanity. Well, at least he'd gotten an answer, but Stan wasn't sure if that was a good thing. **It's something they taught me in speech therapy to get rid of my**

**stutter. I didn't mean for you to hear that.**

That was all? He'd lost sleep over that stupid phrase and that was all it was? Stan went to his room, lied down on his bed and laughed into his pillow. He was relieved and at the same time he wasn't. Maybe he wasn't going crazy, but there definitely was a person talking to him, someone who was going to mess up all of Stan's carefully laid out plans.

**Are you just going to ignore me again now?**

He could almost hear the hurt in the voice, but why would anyone be hurt if he didn't talk to them. His soulmate should be glad that he didn't talk to him. He should be looking for someone else, someone who wasn't so boring and uptight, someone who was excited to hear from him.

*But you don't have a stutter.*

**I do when I talk out loud. It's kind of nice that you can't hear it.**

*Sorry, about being rude yesterday.* Damn it! He'd sworn himself he wasn't going to apologize to the voice in his head. If he couldn't ignore it, then he could've at least stood by that.

**That's alright. I must've surprised you.**

*I thought I didn't have a soulmate.*

**Me too.**

Stan felt a little guilty for never talking to him before, but then his

soulmate hadn't either. He knew why he hadn't done it, but what had been his soulmate's reason? Could he ask him? Would he even want to know? And if he did ask, he'd probably have to answer the same question and Stan didn't know how he was supposed to explain it without hurting his soulmate's feelings. There really wasn't a good way to tell him that he hadn't wanted one.

*This is weird.*

**I know. None of my friends told me it would be this awkward. Maybe it's because we took so long.**

Or maybe it was because of him, because he was awkward and weird and bad at conversations. Eddie and his soulmate were always joking around or bickering. Mike and his soulmate were strangely alike and would have talks for hours; they'd gotten so good at it that Mike was practically always talking to them without getting distracted. How did he do that? Stan had only been hearing that voice in his head for a day and it was very distracting. He knew they couldn't really read his thoughts, but it still felt like his soulmate was intruding on the only space that had ever really been his own.

When he heard the front door slam, Stan let out a sigh of relief. *I can't talk right now. My roommates just got home.*

**Okay... I'll talk to you soon?**

It sounded more like a question, but Stan didn't answer him. Maybe they wouldn't. Maybe that would be better.

He stood up, brushing out the crinkles in his bedding, pushing the curls out of his face and straightening his shirt and was just done, when Eddie and Mike appeared in the doorway. He could see the concern on Eddie's face immediately.

“Are you okay? Are you getting sick? You never lie down during the day.”

Stan smiled. “I’m fine. It’s just a headache.”

Eddie nodded. “Me too. The dude won’t shut up today. He’s listing all the drinks that make his friends slutty. I regret asking about the tequila, but that was three hours ago and he’s still talking.”

Mike patted his back. “He’s just trying to figure out what drink will make you want to sleep with him.”

“He is not!”

“Sure he is. Vee thinks so too.”

“Tell her to shut up. He is n-...” Eddie trailed off, his eyes fixed on his feet now and a slight blush crept onto his cheeks. See, that was how talks with your soulmates were supposed to be. Why couldn’t Stan think of a single thing he wanted to say to his? Or ask him for that matter. He knew the guy had a stutter, but that was about all and he wasn’t even curious to know more about him.

“We’re right, aren’t we?”, Mike said, grinning widely.

“Yeah”, Eddie muttered. “That’s it! I’m going to make him shut up!”

“How?”, Stan asked, suddenly interested. There was a way to do that? He just wanted to know, it didn’t mean he was actually going to do it. But if the voice got to be too much, it was nice to know there was a way to shut it out and be alone in his head again.

“I just try to tell him my name or my address and it shuts down the telepathy link. Actually comes in handy sometimes when you have a chatterbox like that in your head all the time.” Eddie acted annoyed about his soulmate a lot, but Stan knew that was just an act. If he really was that annoyed, he wouldn’t be talking about him so much and he definitely wouldn’t be doing it so fondly. Sure, he sounded annoyed, but the fond was practically oozing out of his face.

“Good to know.”

“Why?”

He hadn’t meant to say it out loud. Fuck! If it’d only been Eddie, he would probably have been able to play it off, but Mike was different. Especially when he got that glint in his eyes like now. Fuck!

“Just in c-case.” Stan could feel his face heat up and one look at Mike told him, he was truly fucked.

Mike wiggled his eyebrows. “Bullshit! Do you have a voice in your head, Stan?”

“Do you?” Eddie looked truly shocked. Or betrayed. Stan would feel betrayed. Eddie had told him immediately when he had started to hear his soulmate and Stan hadn’t done the same.

“You can tell us.”

Stan turned his back on them to fiddle with the stuff on his desk. There were exactly three pencils in a jar in the upper right corner, almost new and perfectly sharpened, but Stan still picked each one up and inspected it, running his thumb over the pointy tip, then

putting them back.

“Stan?”

Ignoring them, his fingers moved on to his notebook, placed exactly an inch below the jar. He flicked through the pages, noting how neat his writing was in comparison to his entry from last night, when he had been pondering that stupid phrase about the fists. Abruptly he closed the book and put it back on the desk, making sure it was exactly in the right place.

“It’s nothing”, he said quietly. “It’ll probably go away.”

Although he had his back turned to his friends, he knew they were looking at each other, communicating silently. He’d seen them do it too often, he’d been part of those silent conversations before. He counted the seconds and got to 21 until Mike spoke.

“That’s not usually how this works”, he said.

“Do you want it to go away, Stan?” Eddie stepped closer, Stan could hear his soft footfall on the carpet, could feel him lingering at a short distance behind him. “I know you always said, you didn’t want one, but... I don’t know... I wouldn’t want to give up on it.”

Yeah, but he was different. He didn’t think that having a soulmate was comforting at all, it put way more pressure on him than he was able to handle. But how was he supposed to explain that to Mike and Eddie?

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t have to”, Mike said. “It takes some getting used to, but

after that it's pretty great. Just give it a chance."

That was probably sound advice, but Stan just thought it would make this more difficult. It was best he just shut his soulmate out right now and didn't let it go on for too long. He didn't want to make him believe that they'd be like all the other soulmates, that they'd meet and fall in love and be happy forever, because that was not how life was for Stan. That was not part of the path laid out for him.

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**Sorry for shutting you out before. My friend was going through a crisis.**

Richie took a deep drag of the cigarette before handing it over to Bev. He considered to sulk and just not answer, but only briefly. He was never able to stop talking to his Swish, no matter how much he annoyed him and shutting him out was Richie's biggest pet peeve. He'd been in the middle of a great hypothesis about which drink was his Swish's favourite, not that he remembered much of that now. It was almost two hours later.

*What kind of crisis?*

**Soulmate. Turns out he has one after all.**

*Is that the one, who doesn't want one? Guess he's changed his mind now, huh?*

When his Swish had told him about that friend, Richie had been sure the friend was an idiot. Everyone wanted a soulmate, why wouldn't you? It was the greatest thing that had ever happened to him and if that voice in his head was going to disappear forever, Richie wasn't sure how he would deal with that. Not well, that was for sure.

**No idea. He doesn't want to talk about it, but he's acting weird.**

*The guy watches birds for fun, pumpkin. He's always weird.*

**Don't make me shut you out again.**

*Sorry.*

Bev passed the cigarette back. They were sitting on their balcony, watching the night creep over the city and the stars come out. She had placed her head on his shoulder and he was absently running his fingers through her short hair. It had been a while since either of them had said anything, both enjoying the silence, although Richie was almost sure, she was having a conversation in her head. He'd been a bit jealous until the Swish had popped back into his.

*Our guitarist got a soulmate too. He's an asshole.*

**How do you know?**

*Because he said so. Apparently the first thing he said was 'Shut up'. Romantic.*

**The first thing you said to me was 'I hope your mom is hot'.**

*Which you never confirmed or denied. Is she? I mean, I'm going to bang her either way.*

**I thought you already were.**



*Yeah, you should join next time.*

**You are fucking gross. I hate you.**

*You love me, Honey Bunny.*

Richie took the following silence as a yes. They had never seriously talked about it, but Richie was sure, that whatever he was feeling for his soulmate was the closest he had ever been to love. Still, that wasn't something he was going to tell anyone and maybe he was a little romantic too, but he didn't want to tell him over their telepathic link. He wanted to look him in the eyes, when he told him for the first time and if that meant he'd have to wait another ten years, then so be it.

**What are you doing right now?**

*Your mom.* Richie blew out the smoke into the night sky and took one last drag from the cigarette before putting it out against the wall. *We're on the balcony, smoking and watching the stars.*

**How romantic.**

It might be, if they weren't so extremely gay and not into each other. It still filled Richie with great joy to hear how cold his Swish sounded when he said that. *Are you jealous?*

**I have a perfectly good balcony myself and the stars look just as great from here. At least there's no gross cigarette smoke here.**

Richie smiled. He hadn't thought his Swish would admit it, but he knew he was. Richie would be if someone else was enjoying this

beautiful view with his soulmate, it didn't matter if they were just friends or not.

*Wait, did you just go out onto your balcony just so we could both watch the stars at the same time? That's so corny.*

**Maybe.**

*You're a fucking sap.*

**And you're ruining it.**

*Nah... I love it. We should do this together some time. Like really together.*

**I wish.**

---

It was as if his soulmate had sensed that Stan didn't want to talk him, because it was almost a week later until he heard the voice again. Mike had dragged him and Eddie to an event at the library. Poetry Slam. It wasn't the worst, but it was still a crowd of people and Stan preferred normal poetry to these dramatic readings or whatever you wanted to call it. Some of them were good, he had to admit, but he'd still rather sit at home and read the poems for himself.

**Do you like music?**

Although the voice was so soft, it still made Stan jumped. Eddie, who was sitting next to him, gave him a curious look, but Stan just pretended to listen to the girl on stage talking about heartbreak or something.

*I guess.*

**I'm in a band. I play guitar.**

Stan nodded until he realized his soulmate couldn't see that and stopped. He was horrible at conversations. When it was face to face, he was at least able to keep the other person talking by nodded and humming and smiling, that wasn't going to work now. *I don't.*

**Okay.** Stan thought he could hear amusement in his tone. **Then what do you do?**

*Right now I'm in a library, listening to people pour their heart out with poetry. It's very dramatic. And emotional. Somebody might cry on stage.*

**You like poetry? I feel like I sense some sarcasm.**

*I like poetry when it is written, not shouted at me.*

**Then why are you there?**

*My friend works here and he dragged us to the thing.*

**Friends who make you go out and do stuff are the worst, I hear.**

Stan stifled a chuckle. Maybe talking to this guy wasn't the worst. At the moment it was fun, at least more interesting than the poetry slam. He could see the appeal.

**My friends have all ditched me tonight.**

*And you're stuck with me. Ran out of other options?* He didn't know if it was a joke or not. It wasn't like he minded talking to this guy, even if that was a last resort, but if it was true, Stan would rather he wouldn't talk to him. He didn't want this guy to think he had to talk to him.

**No! Not at all. I was just wondering if you liked music or not.**

*Everyone likes music. It's the kind of music that's important. What do you play with your band?*

**Rock and Indie mostly. Sometimes we cover something.**

That sounded loud. Stan preferred songs you could dance and sing along to. Sometimes he liked rock too, but it was usually too much going on for his taste.

*That sounds nice.*

When he didn't get an answer, Stan thought his soulmate had found something else, something more interesting to do. That was okay, most things were more interesting than talking to him, Stan knew. The next person on stage wasn't even that bad. He had a rather funny poem about self-doubt, funny despite the fact it hit a little too close to home.

**Actually I wanted to tell you something. If you're still there.**

*I am.*

**Good. So... uhm... I feel like you hate me or something for never**

talking to you before and I just wanted to tell you why. I've stuttered all my life and I always had this stupid idea that I would stop at some point and I just... I didn't want to stutter when I talked to you for the first time, so I was working on it and working on it and working on it and it just never went away and then so much time had passed and nobody had tried talking to me that I thought I didn't have a soulmate. I'm sorry. But I'm just saying, if you're mad because I waited so long to talk to you, it's dumb, because you could've just done it first.

He was stupid. He was also an awful person, because here was his soulmate nervous about talking to him because of a stutter and he'd never even given it a thought to try it out. He'd just gone on with his life and hoped he didn't have a soulmate. He was a fucking jerk.

*I can't even hear your stutter.*

**No, but I didn't know it was going to be like this, did I?**

Stan hesitated. He knew he had to say something, at the very least he had to apologize too, but he still hadn't figured out how to tell him why he hadn't tried talking to him.

*I'm not mad at you. I'm just an awkward person, sorry.*

**That's not something you have to apologize for. I also doubt that's true.** Why did he have to be so nice? How was he supposed to tell him when he was being so damn nice? **Why didn't you talk to me earlier?**

*I... I just always thought the idea of having another voice in my head was weird and didn't want to encourage it. Not having a soulmate didn't seem like such a bad thing to me.*

**Oh. Okay.**

Silence. Stan held his breath as long as he could, waiting for the voice to come back, but it didn't. Maybe he should've said something else. Told him that he'd changed his mind or that he didn't dislike it as much as he thought he would, but he couldn't get himself to lie like that.

He waited for the voice to return all night, considered a thousand things to say to him, but in the end both of them remained quiet. Maybe Mike had been wrong, maybe sometimes soulmates could just go away again. Stan knew it was best this way.

---

Bill was sitting at a table, scribbling into a notebook, when Richie entered the café. He always did that these days, writing things down he wouldn't let them see. Richie had thought it was just a story or something, Bill sometimes wrote short stories, but once he'd caught a glimpse of the words and discovered it was letters, sometimes just individual phrases.

When Bill saw him, he quickly put the notebook away and smiled at him. Richie pulled the other chair out, turned it around and straddled it, resting his arms on the back. "What are you writing, Big Bill? Is it a love letter to me? You know I'm into grand gestures, reading isn't my thing."

"It's n-n-nothing."

"If it was nothing you wouldn't hide it like that."

Bill held his gaze for a moment. Richie knew that gaze too well; he was considering telling him something important. It always offended him a little when Bill had to think this long about telling him

something. When had he ever proven himself untrustworthy. There wasn't a secret of Bill's he hadn't kept. Well, maybe he had told his Swish, but that didn't count, he didn't even know Bill. Okay and maybe he had told Bev a few times.

"It's j-just stuff I need to g-g-get out of my head", Bill finally said.

"About?"

"M-m-m-m-m-my s-s-s-s-soulm-m-m-m..." Bill sighed. The word just wouldn't come out, but Richie understood anyway. The soulmate. Bill hadn't really talked about him again after that day at band practice and Bev had forbidden Richie to prod him, which was fine because Richie had actually forgotten about it after a few days. He was too busy planning a Halloween party and perfecting that song and flirting with his Swish.

"Why don't you just tell him?"

Bill shook his head. Now that Richie thought about it, Bill didn't look like someone who had just discovered the bond with his soulmate. He still remembered how giddy he had been, when he'd first heard that voice in his head, how he'd told anyone who would listen about his Swish. Bill had known about his soulmate for about three weeks now and if anything he seemed unhappier than before.

"What did he do?", Richie asked. Looked like this guy really was an asshole. Sometimes it happened that soulmates didn't get along, but it was rare and Richie was still convinced that nobody could hate Bill.

"He d-d-doesn't want a voice in his head. He d-doesn't want to t-t-talk to me."

That was impossible. Talking to Bill was fucking great. Bill was funny

and he listened and he always had advice and he knew about lots of things... Bill was a fucking delight and Richie was going to find this stupid bastard and punch him in his stupid face.

“Clearly this guy is a piece of shit”, Richie said matter-of-factly. “You’re better off without him. Don’t worry, we’ll find you someone else, someone much better.”

Bill waved him off. “That’s n-n-not the point, Ruh-Rich. I j-j-just don’t underst-st-stand.”

“Neither do I, you’re a fucking catch. If I weren’t this devoted to the handsome devil waiting to make an honest woman out of me once fate gets her shit together, I’d date you. I’d date you so fucking hard, your mom would get jealous.” Richie stood abruptly and pulled Bill up by his arm. “Come on, Big Bill, we’re going on a friend date and I’ll hook you up with the prettiest guy or girl I can find.”

Bill rolled his eyes at him, but at least he was laughing. That was all Richie wanted right now. Fuck that soulmate of his. He didn’t know what he was giving up on and like hell was Richie just going to sit around and let his friend hurt like that.

Three hours later, Richie was drunk. Not as drunk as Bill, but still pretty drunk. His eyes wandered sluggishly from the almost empty tequila bottle in his hand to Bill’s bedroom door, behind which he had disappeared only moments ago with the most handsome guy Richie could find in that last bar. He was supposed to leave now, he knew, but Bill’s couch was so comfortable and he was too tired to walk all the way home. It was only two blocks, but still... too far.

He set the bottle onto the table a little too hard, then fell back into the couch. *I told you tequila makes him slutty.*

**What are you talking about?** Oh... Richie hadn’t meant to tell his



Swish, but that was just as well.

*My friend. He gets slutty when he drinks tequila.*

**It's not even 10pm and you had tequila? Are you drunk?**

*Slightly. It was an emergency.*

**What kind of emergency requires drinking?**

*Told you our guitarist's soulmate was a fucking asshole, didn't I? Told him he didn't want to talk to him, didn't want a soulmate. The fucking nerve!*

**I'm sorry. So your solution was to get him drunk?**

*Get him fucking drunk and find him a nice hook-up. Mission accomplished.*

**Congratulations... I guess.**

*Thank you. If I ever find that fucker I'm ready to punch him. Without explanation. I'm just going to clock him.*

**It's great that you protect your friend like that, but maybe... don't fight someone who's bigger than you.**

*Honey! Sweetie! Love Muffin! I'm huge, nobody is bigger than me. I'll fight him!*

**Okay fine, but never call me Love Muffin again.**

*You like that one? Your mom does too.*

**Why can't you be a sweet drunk?**

*Want me to tell you how much I love you? How much I want to kiss that beautiful face of yours? How I want to hold you in my arms? How I want to listen to you snore when you sleep next to me? How I want to hold your hand?*

Okay, maybe he was a lot drunk. The silence stretched on and Richie started to panic. What if he had scared him off? What if he wanted none of that? Or what if he wanted that now, but then changed his mind once they met? Maybe he didn't like him in person. Maybe his soulmate would be disappointed with what he got.

**I don't snore! Richie giggled. And how do you know I'm not hideous?**

*You sound hot. And if I'm wrong and you're not, don't worry, I'm plenty handsome for the both of us.*

**I believe that when I see it.**

*You will.*

**Soon, I hope. Is it weird that I miss you even though we're talking right now?**

*Not weird at all, babe. I miss you too.*

---

The dreaded Halloween party had come faster than expected. Maybe he would've had more time to prepare for it, if he hadn't been worrying about his soulmate. A month of silence. Stan had thought that this was what he wanted, but he couldn't help and wonder what his soulmate was up to, how he had taken Stan's rejection or just who he was. What job did he have? What were his friends like? Did he get a lot of shit for his stutter? What did he want to do with his life?

Sometimes the need to talk to him almost drove Stan insane. He'd started to whisper to himself, when he was alone just to get it out of his system, but Mike and Eddie had caught him doing it multiple times now and they were worried. Thankfully, they had stopped asking about it, when it had been clear Stan wasn't going to talk about his soulmate.

Now, he was looking at himself in the mirror, brushing the curls away from his eyes. Mike had picked costumes for them, because otherwise he and Eddie wouldn't have dressed up. Captain America was not bad, at least it didn't involve him painting his face, but Stan still felt uncomfortable in the costume. He looked ridiculous dressed up as a superhero, when he was heroic as a... slug or something else that wasn't heroic at all.

"Are you done yet?" Mike appeared in the doorway, wearing... was that a wig, a curly, blonde wig? He also wore a light blue polo tucked into white shorts, white socks and squeaky clean, white sneakers.

"What is that?", Stan asked horrified. Mike looked so stupid, and yet he felt like he already knew who he was supposed to be. Maybe they were best friends, but right now Stan thought he couldn't hate him more.

"I'm you." Mike grinned. "Specifically you six years ago, when I met you for the first time."

“My hair does not look like that.”

Mike pulled the wig off and threw it carelessly over his shoulder, where it landed on their dining table. “It’s a little much, you’re right. It works better without it.”

Stan crossed his arms. Not only was he supposed to go to a party full of strangers in this ridiculous outfit, but his friend was making fun of him and would probably draw attention to him every time someone asked about his costume. How was he going to survive this night?

Eddie appeared next to Mike, dressed in a banana costume, looking as angry as Stan felt. He took one look at Stan and then punched Mike in the arm. “How come he gets a decent costume?”

“There weren’t many options in your size. Unless you wanted to go as sexy nurse?”

“Fuck you!”

---

People were packed in their apartment and there were still people coming in constantly. Maybe they had invited too many people, but Richie wasn’t sure all of them had actually been invited. He didn’t know half of the guests, but didn’t really care. All of them were enjoying his sweet DJ-skills and getting drunk, exactly how it should be.

He took a moment to scan the crowd in the living room. Ben, dressed as a pirate, was handing out snacks, being a better host than himself or Bev. Bill, dressed like a skeleton – a costume Richie had to talk him into, because it was just face-paint and a skin-tight morphsuit. Perfect to show off Bill’s abs and get laid. – was talking to a cute girl

in a Catwoman costume. Was it time to bring out the tequila? Better do it sooner than later, if Bill was too much of a gentleman, he might not get any tonight and sober Bill was always a fucking gentleman.

It broke his heart to put someone else in charge of the music, but Richie had a job to do and being a good wingman was almost as important as being a good DJ. It took him forever to make his way through the living room and the hall into the kitchen. Bev was answering the door as he passed. Greeting Captain America, a banana and a black guy dressed like a white guy. Richie took a moment tonwave at them and tug on Bev's tail – she was dressed as the devil – and he could feel their eyes linger on him.

Richie winked at the guy in the banana suit, who was staring openly, and he blushed. Cute.

The kitchen was gross. People had spilt all kinds of liquids over the counters and the floor, chips were everywhere and a hot dog and a bee were making out against their fridge.

“Don't mind me, amigos”, he said and pushed them away to get to the tequila in the fridge. They hadn't even noticed him, too occupied with twisting their tongues together.

Richie found some salt and lemons and made his way back to living room. When he finally arrived, Bill wasn't talking to Catwoman anymore. Richie put an arm around his shoulder and dragged him away from the group of guys who were all dressed as bloody lumberjacks for a reason. “It's time for shots, Big Bill!”

“What is it w-w-with you and t-t-tequila?”, Bill shouted. Richie just winked at him, led him to the couch and shooed some people off it, so he and Bill could sit. Did Bill truly not know? Maybe not, he could be painfully oblivious about himself. It had taken him months to figure out that Sandy Callahan had had a crush on him back in high school even though the girl had been shamelessly flirting with him at

every opportunity.

Richie poured them each a shot, shook some salt onto their hands and handed Bill a lemon slice. They downed the shot and Bill pulled a face like he'd just taken a shot of horse piss. Ah yes, the delights of tequila.

“Want to do a body shot next?”, he asked, wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

“I’m g-g-good.” Bills eyes wandered over Richie’s body, then came back to his face. “Weren’t you supposed to be a sexy vampire?”

“I am!” Richie grinned again to show off the plastic fangs, Bev had glued to his teeth.

“No, you’re just Richie with f-f-fangs.”

“So a vampire and I’m already hot as hell. I’m a sexy vampire. And I’ll have you know, regular Richie wouldn’t mess up his perfect hair like this or wear a ripped silk blouse like this.” Because the thing had started clinging to his body the moment he’d started sweating and Richie already considered just ditching the stupid thing. Vampires could walk around with a bare chest, and it wasn’t like the blouse was covering much of his torso anyway.

“R-r-regular Richie would a-absolutely wear that. R-regular Richie likes to buh-be naked.”

Richie shrugged, Bill did have a point there, and poured them another shot. It was good to see his friend happy again and it only took the wonders of sex and alcohol to accomplish that. Richie didn’t catch him write things down as often as before, and he was sure that

Bill would've forgotten about his dickhead soulmate in another few weeks. Richie was going to make sure of that.

After another two shots, Richie traded his spot on the sofa with sexy witch, who had been making eyes at them for a while. He watched Bill talk to her and felt like a puppet master, making his little puppets dance. He was damn good at this. Maybe he could start a business out this.

**How's your party going?**

*Exactly like I wanted it too. Yours?*

He hadn't expected to hear from his Swish this soon. He usually only started talking to him, when he was out after he'd gotten drunk and Richie had been looking forward to that. His Swish was damn cute, when he was drunk.

**I'm surrounded by strangers and my roommate dressed me up as a banana. And the music is awful.**

*There's a banana boy at my party too, but at least the music is great.*

**They're playing the Safety Dance.**

Richie looked to Ben, who had taken over the music and was playing Safety Dance. He was a nostalgic bastard, that's why. When they'd met Ben at a party during college, he'd been an awkward fellow surrounded by a bunch of architecture nerds. Bev had pointed him out to Richie, because he'd done this weird little swaying dance at the edge of the dance floor. Richie had gone and requested Safety Dance and he and Bev had dragged Ben onto the dance floor with them and they'd been friends ever since.

*Here too. What are the chances?*

**Safety Dance is not a great song.**

What were the chances of that? The same song, a guy in a banana costume... It couldn't be him, could it? Richie tried to remember banana boy's face. He'd been cute, but would that be the face that matched this voice?

*Say... did you by any chance go to this party with a guy dressed as Captain America and a black guy with horrible dress sense?*

**Yes. How do you know?**

No way! No fucking way! Richie scanned the living room, but couldn't find anyone dressed as a banana. Fate was weird sometimes. Now he'd been talking to this guy for half his life and then he just showed up at his house? Maybe fate wasn't such a bitch after all.

*Because you're at my fucking party, Darling! I'm coming to find you now!*

**No way! Are you sure?**

*Were you greeted by a stunning red-headed devil and an even handsomer vampire who totally caught you checking him out?*

**Shit! Where are you?**

Richie was already moving through the crowd. How hard could it be to find someone dressed in an obnoxious yellow suit? He was not in the living room, not in the hall either.



*Are you hiding from me, banana boy?* Richie asked, when he got to the kitchen and he wasn't there either. Their apartment wasn't this big, how had he not found the guy yet? His heart was racing at this point, his cheeks hurt from smiling so big and maybe he looked a bit like a lunatic, but fuck it. His soulmate was in his house right now and he was going to finally meet him. *Where the fuck are you?*

## **Balcony.**

*And you couldn't have said that earlier? Stay there!*

Impatiently he pushed through the crowd, getting a little rough at some points, but Richie didn't care. He'd blame the alcohol later. It was funny how he had waited ten years, but now that his soulmate was only seconds away, he couldn't get there fast enough.

When he finally reached the glass door, he pushed it open and stumbled onto the balcony, breathing heavily. And there he was, dressed in a ridiculous banana costume, his face flushed, his brown hair sticking to his sweaty forehead and he was looking at Richie with big, brown eyes like a deer caught in headlights.

"Hey there, banana boy", he said, slowly walking towards him.

The shorter man surged forward and wrapped his arms around Richie's middle, holding on for dear life. Richie was sure, he could hear his heart beating fast, the way he pressed his head against his chest. They stood there in the cool October night, holding each other for an eternity, while the party inside was almost forgotten.

"It's Eddie, by the way", the banana said and Richie realized that it was the first time he heard that voice. Like actually heard it.

“Eddie Spaghetti”, Richie said. “I like that.”

Eddie groaned and it was the exact reaction Richie had so often imagined, but had never been sure about. “Just Eddie.”

“Just Eddie is boring. How about Eds?”

“No!”

“Want me to call you Love Muffin again?”

Eddie stepped away from him, but his hands were still on Richie’s sides as he looked up at him. He was perfect. Over the years he’d tried to picture his soulmates. He’d given him little hints, like, Richie had known that he was short and that his hair was brown, but he’d never successfully conjured up a picture of the guy. That was just as well, because he would’ve been wrong. Nothing he could’ve dreamed up would have come close to Eddie.

“No”, Eddie said. “I want you to kiss me, you idiot!”

Richie barked out a short laugh, then his hand curled around the back of Eddie’s neck, bringing him closer again. When his nose brushed against Eddie’s, he stopped for a second. He was about to kiss his soulmate. After ten years of flirting and teasing and dreaming about it, he was finally going to do it. Eddie’s shaky breath felt hot against Richie’s lips and then he closed the gap and they were kissing. Eddie surprised him by wrapping his arms around Richie’s neck, pushing himself closer, kissing him back fiercely.

And then he pulled away just as quickly. “Ow!” Eddie’s lower lip was bleeding, where one of Richie’s fangs had cut him. Maybe not the

best costume for meeting your soulmate and making out wildly on the balcony.

Richie smiled, pulled him closer and licked the blood off his lip, then pressed a soft kiss to it.

“That’s so gross!”

“That means you’re stuck with me for eternity now! You’ll be my vampire bride.”

“Maybe that’s just enough time to figure out your name”, Eddie said.

Richie grinned sheepishly. “Sorry, I was too busy kissing you.” He grabbed Eddie’s hand and shook it. “I’m Richie! So great to finally meet you Mr Eds! I’m a big fan, very big fan.”

Eddie laughed and Richie’s heart started doing somersaults in his chest. That sound was perfect, better than any song he’d ever come up with. “You’re a fucking idiot!”

“You love me!”

Eddie hesitated, but then he nodded. “I do.”

“I love you too.”

Then Eddie’s hand was in his hair, pulling him down to meet him for another kiss. This time they kissed slowly, gently. Richie was careful not to hurt him with his stupid plastic fangs again. At first it was a bit difficult to hold back like this, but then he reminded himself that they’d have all the time in the world from now on. His Swish was finally here. His Eddie.

---

He was alone in a room full of strangers. Mike was talking to the devil girl and had been doing so for the past hour or so and Eddie had disappeared and abandoned him and now Stan was sitting on the couch, watching people he didn't know dance and get continuously drunker. Maybe he should just go home, but he knew his friends would worry if he just left and if he told Mike he wanted to leave, he'd convince him to stay anyway.

A guy, dressed like a skeleton sat down next to him. Stan had seen him dance before, now he looked exhausted or maybe just drunk. Stan also noticed that he was hot. A good body, probably a good face under all that paint, definitely gorgeous eyes.

He smiled when he noticed Stan. "Hey!"

"Hi."

"Why are you s-sitting all alone?"

Stan froze. The music was loud and he hadn't heard him well at first, but now... The stutter, the voice, it was him. Fuck! Would he recognize his voice? It was loud and the guy was drunk, but he might still be able to put it together. Stan shrugged, not wanting to say another word to him. That was just his luck. Everyone else had to wait forever until they met their soulmate and he accidentally ran into his only a month after first hearing his voice. If Stan hadn't been so mean to him, he'd probably be happy, but if he figured out who Stan was, this whole thing would get so ugly.

"I'm B-b-bill", he said and grabbed for the half-empty tequila bottle on the table in front of them. He poured a shot for himself, then held the bottle out to Stan. "You want s-some?"

Stan shook his head, making his curls fall into his eyes. He quickly brushed them away.

Bill looked at the shot in his hand for a moment. "I p-p-p-probably sh-shouldn't either. My friend is t-t-trying to get me drunk." And then he downed it anyway. Stan couldn't help but smile, Bill was clearly

drunk already. “Don’t know where he went though.”

Stan’s mind was racing. What was he supposed to do? Leave? That was rude. Just not answer anything Bill said? Also rude. Tell him the truth? Bad idea. He’d probably get thrown out of the party and make a big scene. But what did that leave? Shit, shit, shit. He’d known that going to a party would be a bad idea.

“You don’t t-talk much, do you?”

Stan shook his head again, hoping the smile on his face wasn’t too fake. He thought of all the things he wanted to tell Bill, starting with ‘I’m sorry’ and ending with ‘I think I’d like to have a soulmate after all’.

“I g-get that. When I-i-I was l-l-l-little, I would avoid talking as much as I c-c-could bec-cause of my st-st-st-stutter, but t-turns out people don’t l-l-listen to you when you don’t s-s-speak up.” Bill giggled a little and sank back into the cushions, his eyes never leaving Stan.

He felt put on the spot. Bill was talking about himself, but Stan still felt like he had seen right through him, had seen all the shit that was wrong with Stan, all the stuff that was constantly on his mind and that he never talked to anyone about, because he didn’t want to be the crazy guy. Maybe Bill knew. He had been in his head after all.

He had to look away from Bill, too afraid that if he held his gaze for too long, Bill would know. Not only that they were soulmates, but all the other stuff too. When something brushed against his hand, Stan jumped, only to find Bill tugging him into the cushions of the couch, a goofy smile on his face. Stan let him and ended up lying only a few inches away from Bill. They were so close, he could smell the alcohol on Bill’s breath.

“It’s a p-party. If you don’t want to d-d-dance, you at least have to r-r-relax.” Easier said than done. His throat was closing up and his heart was beating painfully in his chest. His hands curled into fists, the nails digging into his palms and that fresh, controllable pain finally allowed him to breathe evenly again.

“You’re cute.” Bill’s fingers hovered in front of Stan’s face for a

moment, possibly waiting for Stan to protest, but he couldn't do it. He just held his breath as Bill brushed some curls out of his face, his touch light as a feather, his fingers moved to Stan's jaw and lingered under his chin. He saw Bill's eyes flicker down to his lips and dug his nails deeper into his palms, but it didn't help this time. Bill didn't like him, he was just drunk and that was okay, but Stan couldn't let him do this. He would be so mad if he found out who Stan really was.

Stan jumped up, pushed his path through the other guests and almost ran out of the door. It was only when he was outside, cold air in his face, no loud music in his ears and inspecting the blood under his nails, that he felt like himself again. Yes, Eddie and Mike would worry, but fuck that.

*I'm sorry.*

He didn't expect Bill to answer him and he never did, but Stan at least felt a little better for finally having said it.

---

*You're friends with Captain America, right?*

**What?**

*Captain America from the party. You're pretty, but sometimes you're slow.*

**You usually call him bird boy.**

*Wait that was bird boy? I always thought bird boy would be ugly, because he... you know watches birds.*

**Why are you interested in Stan?**

*Not me. My friend. He won't shut up about how pretty Cap was.*

**What friend?**

*The skeleton, has a stutter, handsome, absolutely needs to get himself a boyfriend because his soulmate is a piece of shit.*

**Okay. I'll see what Stan thinks.**

---

As soon as Stan stepped into the apartment, he knew something was wrong. There was food on the table, Eddie was doing something in the kitchen and Mike ushered him over as soon as he noticed him. They'd planned this, because he'd been great at avoiding any serious conversation since the party. Too bad that could only work for so long, but Stan had really hoped it would last longer than two days.

"Are we celebrating?", he asked as he took a seat.

They hadn't really done anything special for Eddie for finally meeting his soulmate, but that was hardly their fault. Eddie hadn't been home much. Stan was a little disappointed that he had left before he could meet that mystery guy, but there would be plenty of opportunities for that and he could not have stayed any longer.

"Just thought we could have dinner together. We rarely do", Mike said.

"I know something is up, don't play dumb." Stan filled his plate, mostly because he needed something to do and he didn't want to look at his friends.

"We could say the same to you", Eddie said, a certain edge in his voice. "You've been shutting us out for weeks now. Like, what the fuck happened with your soulmate?"

Stan briefly glanced at him, then fixed his gaze on his plate. There were still small crescent scars on his palms and he was suddenly aware how easy they were to spot, if he wasn't careful.

For a while none of them said a word, the only sound coming from their cutlery on the plates. Even if Eddie tried to hide it, Stan could tell he was mad. Mike might not be, but it also took a lot to piss Mike off. Was it really worth it? He didn't want to fight with Eddie about something like this, about something that was over anyway.

"Richie asked about you today", Eddie said. It took Stan a moment to place the name, but then he remembered: Eddie's soulmate. "A friend of his is interested in you. Did you meet someone at the party?"

Oh, only his soulmate. Bill could be the only one who was asking for him, he was the only one Stan had talked to at that party. He remembered Bill's gentle touch when he had brushed his curls away, remembered the way Bill had looked at him. With a loud clang Stan's fork fell onto his plate.

"I think he wants to meet you again."

"No." His voice was barely above a whisper but still firm. He could not see Bill again and why would he anyway? Stan hadn't said a single word to him and then fled when he had tried to... tried to what? Had he really tried to kiss him or was that something Stan had imagined?

"Why not?", Eddie asked. "I've met the guy. He seems cool." He grinned. "Good looking too."

Slowly Stan raised his head, looking first at Eddie then at Mike and then buried his face in his hands. How had this all become such a mess? Why did Eddie's soulmate have to be friends with his? Why did he have to go to that party? Why did Bill have to ask about him? Why? None of this was turning out how Stan had planned it to and it was entirely too much.

He only realized he had started to cry, when someone – Eddie – placed a hand on his shoulder, a moment later Mike did too. The silent tears quickly turned into full on bawling and Stan just couldn't stop. He was sucking in air in between the sobs, but still felt like he couldn't breathe, like the lump in his throat was suffocating him. They lead him over to the couch, but Stan barely registered that, he was too focused on breathing. Someone wrapped their arms around him, Stan finally dropped his hands and cried into Mike's shirt.

"Hey", Eddie hummed, rubbing his back. "Hey, it's okay. It's alright."

Slowly Stan calmed down, but he didn't move. It was easier to explain with his arms around Mike's waist, his face hidden in Mike's chest.

"I can't see him", he said finally. "He's my soulmate."



“Stan, that doesn’t make sense.”

No, it probably didn’t make sense to anyone but him. Maybe he was the only person on earth who knew who their soulmate was and had ran away from them. That’s how fucked up he was. Stan took a deep breath and then explained.

When he was done, he felt slightly better, but not much. Just talking about it, didn’t make the issue go away. Just because he felt better, didn’t mean it actually was better.

“Maybe you could explain it to him, just like you did now”, Mike suggested.

Eddie nodded. “He’s your soulmate, he’ll understand.”

“He’s going to be mad. Wouldn’t you be mad, if Richie had seen you, talked to you and never said anything about being your soulmate? He’s going to hate me even more.”

“You don’t know that.”

Bill had never responded telepathically to his lame apology, that pretty much meant he hated him. And he had looked so content at the party, Stan didn’t want to ruin that. Bill should be happy and not have to deal with a crappy soulmate like him.

“We’ll figure this out”, Eddie promised, but Stan didn’t believe him.

---

*I’m here!*

Richie stared at the door for a few seconds until Eddie opened, rolling his eyes at him. “You could just ring the bell like a normal person, Richie.”

Richie slung an arm around Eddie’s waist, pulled him close and kissed him. “But I’m not a normal person. I’m your soulmate.”

Eddie pulled him inside, closing the door behind them. “Do you think they do take-backs?”

“Maybe I could swap for your mom”, he said, while he looked around the place. It was the first time he was at Eddie’s place and it definitely was different from his and Bev’s place. This apartment didn’t look like three men in their mid-twenties lived here, it was all so clean and in place, also a little absent of colours. Hopefully that wasn’t so much due to Eddie but to his roommates.

One of them was currently sitting on the couch, a laptop balanced on his knees. He ran a hand through his curls and looked at Richie... anxiously? Weird.

Richie strode over to him, grinning widely. “Bird boy! So glad to finally meet you.”

The anxious look was immediately replaced with a frown.

**Told you not to call him that to his face.** But where was the fun in that?

“Bird boy?”

“You like to birdwatch, Eddie told me. But I can call you Cap if you prefer that. That’s what Bill calls you.” Richie winked at him. He still didn’t know why he had to actually come over here and talk to Stan about this. It would’ve been so much easier if they’d just set up a date for him and Bill and let them do their thing, but Eddie had promised to explain once he was here. And it wasn’t like he minded coming over. He’d always been curious about how Eddie lived.

“I think I preferred it when only Eddie could hear you”, Stan replied dryly. He closed the laptop and looked over at Eddie, judging by the range of facial expressions going on, they were communicating silently. Bev was really good at that too, but Richie always thought it was best to just spit it out.

“If you don’t want to go out with Billy, you could’ve just said so”, Richie said. “I mean, you’d be wrong, but it is an option.”

**Shut up for a second, please.**

*Are we having secret conversations in front of your friends now? Want me to talk dirty to you?*

**Richie, please.**

Alright, if he was going to ask so nicely. He sat down in a big, grey armchair, stretching his long legs and was surprised, when Eddie took a seat on his lap. There was plenty of other places to sit, but Richie wasn't complaining.

**Remember how you always say you want to punch Bill's soulmate?**

*Sure.*

**Okay, now remember Stan is my best friend and if you hurt him, there'll be hell to pay.**

*Eds, what's going on?*

"Stan is Bill's soulmate", Eddie said out loud. He was what now? That didn't make any sense. They'd met at the party, surely Bill would've known if he was. Richie looked over at the guy on the couch. He was clutching his hands in his lap, but other than a little tension he seemed pretty detached from the conversation.

"He's not", Richie said. Sure, he wanted to punch the guy who had hurt Bill, but bird boy was not that guy. He couldn't be.

"I am", Stan said. "I recognized his voice."

"And so would he."

"I didn't say anything to him."

That was stupid, but possible. Why should they lie about this? Eddie knew how much Richie despised Bill's soulmate and he would've told Stan and he had told Richie not to hurt Stan. Well, he hadn't promised anything. Maybe he did want to punch bird boy.

As if he was sensing Richie's thoughts, Eddie gently tugged at the hair in the back of his neck. **It's complicated.**

"So what?", Richie asked. "You want me to tell Bill that? Want me to

tell him you don't want to see him, because you're a fucking coward? Don't you have more practice at that?"

Stan shook his head. "No, I... I don't really know what to do."

"I think he should tell Bill the truth", Eddie said.

"But it might be better if he didn't know. He seemed better off", Stan said. And what? Richie was just supposed to keep it a secret from Bill? When Bill eventually figured it out – and he would – he'd hate Richie forever.

"That's not an option now that you've told me. I'm not lying to Bill." Well, not about this at least. There had been plenty of lying, but that was never anything important.

Was this really Bill's soulmate? This guy was an asshole. Who'd have thought that Eddie's best friend, that bird boy, would be an asshole? Stan sat there on the couch, looking well put together, spoke calmly and didn't even have the nerve to feel bad about what he did to Bill. This was probably just a minor annoyance to him, something that had to be dealt with. Maybe he couldn't hit him, but Richie could certainly hate him. Bill deserved better.

Stan nodded slowly, not saying anything.

*I know you're in my lap to keep me from fucking punching him.*

**Better safe than sorry.**

*Why is he being such a dipshit?*

And then he asked it again, loudly. "Why are you being such a fuckwit? Of course, Bill was doing good at the party, because I wasn't going to let my friend mope around and write stupid novels to his piece of shit soulmate all day."

Something flickered in Stan's eyes, but then it was gone again. "Novels?"

"Forget it!" He didn't want to tell him anything about Bill, Stan would probably just use it to hurt him some more.

"Maybe the same way you've been talking to yourself instead of him", Eddie said and that got a genuine reaction out of bird boy for the first time. He looked horrified, which made Richie smile. That was more like it.

"Eddie!"

"What? You do."

**He's a mess.**

Richie looked first at Eddie and then back at Stan and couldn't help himself but laugh. *We have two wildly different ideas of what mess means, Eds.*

Eddie hit him lightly over the back of his head before he got up and sat next to Stan. He grabbed Stan's wrists and pulled his clasped hands apart, which seemed to take more strength than Richie would've believed.

"Stop", Eddie said softly, while he uncurled Stan's fingers, ran a finger over the small red crescents where Stan's nails had dug into his palms and then Eddie just held his hands. "It's okay, Stan. I told you, we'll figure it out together."

The tone of Eddie's voice would be the end of Richie. He'd never heard him speak like that before, their conversations were mostly happy and fun, sometimes serious and sometimes Eddie would freak out about something, but he'd never spoken this way to Richie. Honestly, he was surprised Eddie had it in him to lend so much support, love and protection just by the tone of his voice.

"Stan knows he has to talk to Bill", Eddie said, finally looking at Richie again. "It's just hard for him to let people in. I mean, it took him a month to finally tell me and Mike what was going on."

"I'm still here, you know", Stan said. His voice was calm with a hint of dry humour, but Richie saw his grip on Eddie's hands tighten.

"Is something wrong", Richie asked. "With you, I mean." There

obviously was, because he'd told Bill he didn't want a soulmate.

Stan's mouth twisted into something that resembled a grin. "Very. How much time do you have?"

Eddie chuckled and bumped his shoulder into Stan's. "Shut up! There's nothing wrong with you, you just... overthink stuff."

"Wait, you think he overthinks? Eddie Kaspbrak, King of Overthinking and freaking out?" Richie had had the voice in his head for ten years and Eddie would freak out over minor things at least once a week, so if he thought Stan was bad, he must really be.

"Fuck off", he said. "Will you help us figure this shit out or what?"

Richie looked at the ceiling, taking a deep breath. "I guess I have to. I'm stuck with you."

---

Stan hated the plan and he usually was a big fan of plans, but this one in particular sucked. They should've told Bill who he was before he met up with him, because he would know as soon as Stan opened his mouth to talk and then he'd leave and Stan had to chase him and Stan had no experience in chasing anything.

He sat on a bench in the park, jiggling his knee nervously, his eyes trained on a flock of finches hoping around on the gravelly path, picking at bread crumbs. Not that he really saw them. In his mind, he was going over the words, he'd worked on with Eddie. Richie had made fun of them, but Stan didn't care, at least he had stopped calling him names. Not that Stan preferred being called bird boy.

*I have to tell you something. I have to tell you something. I have something to tell you. There's something I need to tell you. There's something you need to know. I just wanted to say...* The words would just not stop. He hadn't even noticed, he was whispering them under his breath.

## What?

Shit no! That was not... He hadn't been talking to him, or well... he hadn't meant to talk to him like that. Shit.

Instinctively Stan looked around and saw Bill standing in the distance. He recognized him immediately even without the costume and painted face. He had probably stopped walking when he'd heard Stan's voice, but now that he saw Stan had noticed him, he continued his way over. There was a strained smile on his face as he took a seat next to him.

"I'm sorry!", Stan blurted out, waited a moment for the realization to hit Bill, but it didn't. Well, it had taken Stan a moment to recognize his voice too. "I didn't mean to talk to you like that. I mean... I was just... fuck!"

He saw the exact moment, when the penny dropped. Bill's eyes widened and his face went slack, his mouth falling open. Quick now, before he left.

"I'm sorry! I never meant that I didn't... that I didn't want you. I just... uhm... I thought I didn't have a soulmate and I'd gotten used to it and then you were there and it was all so confusing, but I didn't mean that... that I didn't want you there." He was talking off-script, he didn't even know what he and Eddie had practised, didn't even know what pointers Richie had given him. All Stan knew was that he was failing at this, making everything worse like he always did.

"And y-you c-c-c-c-couldn't have said that? You n-n-n-never talked to me after that again." He sounded pissed, which Stan had expected but still caught him off-guard. He'd never been good at dealing with people being mad at him.

“Didn’t want to upset you. You’re better off without me.” And that was exactly what Eddie had forbidden him from saying, but if he was supposed to come clean it was only fair he mentioned that as well.

“W-w-w-why d-d-d-d-do...” Bill groaned, face turning red with either anger or exertion of not getting the words out. **Why do you say that?**

“Because I make everything worse. I mean, I completely freaked out because I have a soulmate, I was a total dick to you and thought I was doing the right thing and... I like things being a certain way and when they’re not, it’s just... it’s... I don’t know. I kind of break.”

Bill’s eyebrows knitted together. He didn’t get it, nothing new there. Nobody got it. Eddie and Mike pretended they did and maybe they understood it more than other people, but they didn’t get it; not really.

“Everything has a plan”, Stan sighed, trying again to explain it. “And I like the plans. I like knowing what is going to happen and how I’m going to make it happen and then something deviates and the plan doesn’t work anymore and then I just... I shut down until I can figure out a new plan.”

**And I wasn’t part of any plan. I made you shut down.**

“Yeah.”

**You know that’ll happen a lot, right? People don’t tend to follow your secret plans for them.**

Of course he knew that, he also knew how stupid it was. He knew how his neatness was annoying for anyone else, knew that some



things weren't big enough to warrant a thirty minute freakout, knew that plans were supposed to adapt and change, but he just couldn't help it.

"I only have plans for me."

Bill nodded. **Made any new plans that involve me?**

*I'm in the middle of one.*

"And h-h-how does it p-p-pan out?"

Stan shrugged. He didn't know. Richie had said that Bill was pretty understanding, that they'd probably figure it out if Stan cut the crap, but Stan didn't know Richie and he didn't trust him and he was terrified. He didn't think he could go back to his old plans if this didn't work out. He couldn't be alright with not having a soulmate if he knew Bill existed.

**You knew who I was at the party and didn't say anything.**

"I didn't want to make a scene."

"Not b-b-because of me?"

"Because of you? I thought you were great. A little drunk, but great." Bill blushed a little. "I liked what you said about speaking up, it's something I don't really do. It's easier to play along and not make a mess, you know."

"To f-f-follow the plan?"

Stan nodded, a smile tugging at his lips. No, Bill didn't get it, but maybe he could.

"I was afraid to have you in my head. Everything else is neat and in order, but in here." Stan tapped a finger against his temple. "In there it's always a mess and I just... I know that's not how this thing works, but I felt like you could see it all. See everything that's going on."

"S-s-s-sorry. I w-won't do it anym-m-more."

"No, it's fine. I've gotten used to the idea and... I understand if you prefer it because of your stutter."

Stan didn't know if that was okay to say. He didn't mind Bill's stutter at all, but maybe it wasn't something Bill liked to talk about, just like he didn't like to talk about the way his stupid brain worked.

**You know... I still don't know your name. Richie keeps referring to you as bird boy.**

"Any chance he'll ever stop that? I already don't like him."

"He g-g-grows on you", Bill said, smiling.

"I'm Stan."

Bill held out his hand to him. "So, Stan, I th-think you still owe me a d-d-date."

Stan looked at Bills hand, then back up at him. Was that a joke? He hadn't even thought this far, thought about dating Bill, being with

Bill at all. Up to this point he'd still thought Bill would dismiss him, maybe thank him for the explanation and then leave. There was no plan for this. He hadn't even thought of any date ideas. Shit.

### **Don't have a plan for this, do you?**

Bill's voice cut through the impending freakout so easily, it took Stan by surprise and all he could do was laugh. He unfolded his hands – this time his nails hadn't drawn blood – and took Bill's hand.

---

They were unlike other soulmates. Usually by the time soulmates finally meet, they had been talking telepathically for some time and knew each other, but Stan knew next to nothing about Bill and Bill knew even less about him. To say their date was awkward would've been an understatement.

Mostly they just walked around the park, talking; Stan mostly out loud, Bill switching between spoken words and telepathy. Mike had been right, it took some getting used to, but as day was nearing its end, it felt like Bill's voice had always been in his head. It felt almost empty, when Bill talked out loud for a while and Stan was alone with his thoughts again. Weird.

"I feel really stupid now", Stan admitted, looking at his feet, while they waited at a traffic light, because Bill had insisted on walking him home. "I mean, I've blown this whole thing out of proportion and made it out to be the worst thing that could happen to me, when it's really just..."

"Just what?", Bill asked.

Nice. But Stan thought that was lame and didn't convey how much he enjoyed spending time with Bill. But it really was just that. Few

things in Stan's life were just nice, especially not nerve-wrecking things like first dates and meeting your soulmate and fessing up to being a total asshole.

The traffic light turned green and Stan started walking, not answering. Bill quickly followed him, but grabbed his hand to stop him as soon as they had crossed the street. "W-what?"

Stan sighed, still not looking at Bill, who had a habit of looking him directly in the eyes, that Stan didn't think he'd ever get used to. "Good. It feels good."

Bill snorted. "Duh! We're s-s-s-soulmates after all."

But Stan still didn't know what that meant. They weren't like Eddie and Richie, who'd fallen into each other's arms as soon as they'd seen each other. They weren't like Mike and Vee, who could talk 24/7 and never run out of things to say. He didn't know what Bill expected from him and even worse, he didn't even know how he felt about Bill.

Bill, who was still holding his hand, slipped his fingers in between Stan's, then looked back up. "This okay?"

His hand was warm, the grip firm but not too firm, but what made Stan smile was the question. He was glad Bill didn't take it as a given that just because they were soulmates, he could just touch him. It was just like at the party, when he had touched Stan's face; he'd given Stan a choice than too. Stan gave his hand a light squeeze. "It's nice."

They walked in silence for a while. Normally Stan wasn't opposed to silence, but right now he felt like he needed to break it, that Bill would think he was boring if he didn't. He searched his brain, feeling

the seconds tick by and Bill getting annoyed with him, but nothing seemed like a good thing to say. In the end, he just blurted: “Do you think we’ll ever be like Eddie and Richie?”

“I hope f-f-fucking not.”

Both turned to look at the other at the same time. Stan was wary, because he wasn’t sure what Bill so opposed to, not that he wanted a relationship like Eddie and Richie’s; it was exhausting just being around that. Then Bill’s lips twitched and a moment later, both men were laughing loudly.

I mean, they’re probably great for each other, but I’m not interested in fighting with you over stupid shit all the time. Bill was still laughing.

When they’d both calmed down a bit, Stan tried again. “I mean, do you think we’ll ever be that comfortable with each other.”

Stan loved his friends and he’d say he was closer to Mike and Eddie than he was to anyone else, but he still didn’t feel like he could share everything with them, that there were certain things he couldn’t tell them, because they’d be fed up and leave him. He was even more afraid of opening up to Bill, because he was his soulmate, they were supposed to be together forever or something. What if the one person who was supposed to never leave, grew tired of him? He could not be the person who drove his soulmate away.

“I’m p-p-pretty comfortable ruh-right n-now”, Bill told him. Great, so now Stan had offended him by worrying about this. He was the worst soulmate ever, Richie had been right about that, and Bill would realize that soon enough and regret having given him another chance.

He let Bill along, waiting for him to let go of his hand or find an excuse why he had to go. It would happen any minute now.

“Stan.” Stan was forced to stop, when Bill did. This was it, he had finally realized his mistake. Stan stared at the buttons of Bill’s red and black flannel. One of them had been ripped off and replaced, but the new button didn’t quite match the other ones. This one’s shade of

black was just a little off. It didn't match. It di-... Bill had let go of his hand and instead cupped Stan's face, forcing him to meet his eyes and forget about the damn button. Although Stan could feel the intrusive thought about the button in the back of his mind. It just didn't match.

"You w-w-worry a lot about th-things you can't cont-t-trol. I l-l-like you and I like s-spending time with you. That's all that m-matters, right?"

Stan wasn't so sure about that, but it was hard to argue with Bill, when he was looking at him so intensely that Stan felt nobody else had ever seen him the way Bill did right now. The light pressure of Bill's thumbs against his cheekbones was also distracting; he couldn't remember the last time someone had touched him like this, when he had allowed someone to touch him like this.

"I like you too", he breathed. "I just don't... I don't want to disappoint you."

Bill smiled brightly; it made his eyes crinkle and in that moment Stan – even at the risk of sounding corny – thought he was the most beautiful man he'd ever seen. It was impossible not to return the smile. "I think you're g-g-great."

"I think you're greater."

"You're a d-dork!"

Well, better than being called a weirdo or crazy... He'd take being called a dork by Bill any day.

---

Richie slammed the door open with a bang and strode into Eddie's apartment, Bev tucked into his side. "We're here, Losers!"

"We hadn't noticed", Mike responded. He smiled at him, then dragged Bev away from him. Rude. That was the only thing Richie disliked about Mike, he seemed to have made it his number one goal to replace Richie as Bev's number one best friend. Like, they were all

great friends, but Richie was everyone's bestest friend, even Mike and Stan's although they'd only met a couple of weeks ago. It didn't matter, he was their best friend. He didn't make the rules.

While Richie glared at Mike, Eddie had quietly slipped into his side that Bev had just vacated and Richie forgot all about it, wrapping his arms tightly around his boyfriend and making a big show of kissing every inch of his face. Eddie tried to push him away, but his cute little giggles betrayed him. He loved it, of course, he did.

"You should've asked us before giving Richie a key", Stan said, frowning.

"You would've said no", Eddie said, now holding Richie's face in both of his hands to stop him from peppering kisses all over his neck.

"Because that's the s-s-s-sane thing to do", Bill said. He'd walked around Richie and Eddie and was now greeting first Mike and then Stan. Richie noted how they didn't kiss, just hugged and then Stan tugged Bill into his side on the couch. "He doesn't even have one to my p-p-pla-ace."

"Because you're evil, Big Bill, pure evil", Richie said. He took his usual spot in Eddie's favourite armchair with the shorter man sitting half on the armrest, half on his lap. Ben had taken the open spot on the couch next to Bill and Stan and Bev and Mike had disappeared into the kitchen, but returned with beer for everyone and then claimed the loveseat, Bev sitting with her legs in Mike's lap.

"You turned his place into a ball pit that one time", Ben said. "It took us three days to get rid of that."

"Hey, I was doing him a favour and that cost me a fortune."

Bev grinned. "I actually quite liked that."

"And yet you won't let me do the same thing to our place. You're giving me mixed signals, my love."

Bev waved him off. No, maybe living in a ball pit wouldn't be that great, especially not now that he had Eddie. The guy was so short, he'd get lost in it.

It was a relief to see their two friend groups fitting together so perfectly, but if two of them were soulmates and in case of Bev and Mike old college friends, it wasn't a big surprise. In the beginning Richie had still entertained the idea of hitting Stan for being an asshole, but the more he'd gotten to know him and seen the impact he'd had on Bill, it had become kind of hard to hold a grudge. The most noticeable change in Bill had been his stutter. It was still there, but it had gotten so much better. What that had to do with Stan, Richie didn't know, but he didn't care either. As long as his friends were happy, so was he.

"I bet Bev is the next one to meet her soulmate", Eddie said, snapping Richie out of his thoughts. "I just have a hunch."

"Nah, it'll be Mikey", Richie said. "I'll bet you five bucks."

"Deal!" Eddie extended his hand, but quickly withdrew it when Richie spat in his and wanted to shake on it. "You're fucking gross!"

"Oh come on, since when do you mind my spit?" Richie grabbed his chin and licked a line from his jaw to his temple. Eddie furiously wiped at his face and took a seat on the floor, giving Richie a pointed look. "Eddsie! Come back to me!"

"No!"

"Uh... is now a bad time to tell you that I already met Vee?" Everyone's head snapped to Mike, who didn't even have the decency to look sheepish. "She came into the library last week." He shrugged. "I would've told you, but you haven't really been around."

Stan and Eddie both blushed. Pff, what was the big deal, so they stayed with their amazing boyfriends, nothing to be ashamed about. He could give Eddie a reason to blush, if he told everyone about the stuff they'd been doing, but Richie didn't want to risk sleeping alone tonight.

"You could still have said something", Eddie protested. "We've just spent an hour at the supermarket together."

"Yeah, but at this point I just wanted to see if you'd figure it out on



your own.”

Richie leaned over the armrest to get as close to Eddie as he could without getting up. “That means you owe me five bucks.”

“Like hell it does! It doesn’t count now that he’s already met her.”

“And you didn’t shake on it”, Stan said, not so helpfully.

“He still was the next one to meet his soulmate. I fucking won!”

“Did not!”

“Eds, let’s be real for a second, shall we, Sweetpea?”, Richie said sweetly. “My sweet Love Muffin, Snufflepuff, Honey, pumpkin, I so won.”

Eddie groaned, most of the others did too, but who cared about them. “At this point I’ll give you five bucks just to shut up.”

*You don’t have to as long as you come back to Papa.* He patted his lap, grinning at Eddie, whose face contorted even more.

**Do not call yourself that. It’s sick.**

*Do you prefer Daddy?*

**I will fucking kill you, Richie.**

*How are you going to do that from down there?*

“I don’t know what you guys are talking about”, Mike said, chuckling. “But, Richie, you might want to stop. Eddie looks like he’s going to explode.”

“That’s just all his pent-up lust for me”, Richie said. “You should hear what he just said to me. Kinky.”

“Was it his sexy librarian fantasy?”

“Mike!”

The room erupted with laughter as Eddie let himself fall onto his

back, burying his face in his hands. He didn't know what Mike was talking about, but if Eddie was so into librarians that he'd even told Mike about, Richie could work with that.

*I've never voluntarily set foot in a library in my life, but I would for you.*

---

It was hours later, Ben and Bev had left for home, Richie and Eddie, who had made up halfway through the night, had retreated to Eddie's room and so had Mike. Although Stan was tired, he didn't want to move from the couch where he was cuddled up with Bill, who was carding his fingers through Stan's hair as he rested his head on Bill's shoulder. He'd never felt so at peace just sitting with someone. He'd quickly learned that he didn't need to fill the silence between him and Bill, that sometimes it was enough to just be together.

Sometimes Stan thought about the plans he'd abandoned when Bill had showed up in his life, they'd been so stupid. He still had things he looked forward to, but they weren't set in stone anymore. He didn't think of his life as a to-do-list anymore that needed to be checked off.

It was Bill who broke the silence eventually. "Stan, what's your plan for this ap-p-partment?"

"What do you mean?"

"W-w-well Richie and E-eddie are practically inseparable and Mike just met his s-soulmate..."

Stan hummed in agreement. He'd always known they wouldn't be living together forever, it was actually a bit of a surprise that it had lasted this long, but now the idea of them moving out didn't instil dread anymore.

"My place is p-p-p-pretty big, you know."

"Way too big for just one person", Stan agreed.

Bill dug his hand into his pocket and retrieved a small silver key, holding up so Stan could see it. Stan reached out to touch it, but didn't take it.

"Are you sure? You know how I am with the cleaning and stuff."

"As long as you're okay with my little b-b-brother crashing on the couch, whenever he comes to visit."

Although Stan hadn't met Bill's brother yet, he was sure, he didn't mind. He'd been able to put up with Richie sleeping over and that guy made messes everywhere he went, surely Georgie couldn't be that bad. He sat up, taking the key from Bill and beamed at him. "In that case, yes, I will move in with you."

Bill's other hand still rested on the back of Stan's head and he used it now to bring them closer. Stan's fingers curled around the key, which was probably the best thing he'd ever been given, and his other hand came up to cup Bill's cheek. Bill's lips were soft, moving slowly against his own. Kissing Bill was... Stan hadn't yet come up with a good word for it. It was like waking up to sunshine falling through your window, like turning on the car radio to your favourite song, like spotting a rare Kirtland's Warbler, but most of all it was like coming home after a long journey.

Bill had taken the first step when it came to all their firsts. First time using the telepathic link, first word spoken out loud, first date, first kiss, first everything... Mostly because Stan had been afraid that if he pushed too much Bill would pull away, but now he held a key to Bill's apartment in his hand and although it was stupid that he needed this physical thing to feel sure, he finally didn't feel like he could push Bill away by opening up.

When they parted, Stan brushed a thumb over Bill's lower lip, bumped their noses together and was ready to be the first for once. "I love you."

"I love you too."

**Author's Note:**

Another Soulmate AU, I know... I just love them too damn much. This wasn't supposed to have a Reddie POV, but I have too much fun writing conversations between them.

And the "I just forget stuff like a cool person" is from Brooklyn Nine-Nine, but I thought it fits Richie perfectly.

Talk to me on tumblr @itchierichie